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ABSTRACT

The problems facing teacher centers in geographically remote and largely rural areas are discussed. The importance of cooperative planning involving teachers and university faculty is stressed. It is noted that implementing professional development activities depends to a great extent upon the efficiency of inservice delivery systems, and particular emphasis is placed upon effective communication between all participants. Personal contact is considered a vital component of successful teacher centers. It is suggested that a telecommunications system between the university and geographically distant centers can be a valuable tool in maintaining this contact. A description is given of a teacher center network in Montana which incorporates diverse techniques for unifying the efforts of the university and thirty teacher centers. (JD)

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SIGNIFICANT INSERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM DESIGNS FOR GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED SCHOOL PERSONNEL

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INSTRODUCTION

The Teacher Center concept was originally crystallized in Great Britain as a response to a variety of needs, particularly to counteract the bureaucratic mandating of local curriculum specifics.

The establishment of teacher centers in Britain has been the main response to the demand for local teacher education. Teacher centers provide an answer for informal social exchange between teachers, formal discussion among teachers, small scale exhibitions and demonstrations, visiting speakers, inservice training courses, observation and support of material curriculum projects, professional libraries, collections of locally developed lessons and enrichment materials.

In the United States teacher centers are a relatively new development. According to Sharon Fieman in Essays on Teacher Centers, The United States Office of Education was mainly responsible for the modification of the teacher center concept into a behavioral frame of reference. The initial formulation, which appeared in the late 1960's was based on a two year study of methods to improve the preparation of inner city teachers (Smith 1969). The study recommended that a national network of training complexes be established on neutral ground between schools and universities to provide systematic training in the task of teaching. In addition to skill training, the function of the training complex came to include serving as a regional delivery system for educational innovation and as a coordinating mechanism for federal and state programs directed at improving local educational systems. (Cohen and Lichtenbert, 1970)

In 1971, the National Teacher Center project in the Office of Education encouraged universities, state and local education agencies to establish collaborative, comprehensive teacher training programs responsive to public school needs.

Even though no national funding source would be available throughout the United States until 1978, such teacher training programs would be designed to: (1) dissiminate information regarding validated practices and processes from educational research to public schools; (2) improve quality and delivery of inservice education; (3) promote better need assessment and priorities assignment in local areas, and (4) create some form of collaboration in training programs for all school personnel.

Since the teacher programmatic functions given in the preceding have been traditionally viewed as falling under the ambient of schools and colleges of education, it became imperative to resolve this conflict in order to effectively utilize both community and professional resources. Hence, the pressing need for joint planning of cooperative professional endeavors on the part of universities and teacher centers was recognized and subsequently attempted in many communities.

PERSPECTIVES RELATING TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF JOINT ENDEAVORS

The specific area addressed in this section is concerned with perspectives relating to the implementation of those activities planned cooperatively by a university and teacher center. Since the bulk of such endeavors entails organizational structures such as courses, workshops, seminars, tutorials, community agencies, buzz sessions, telecommunications and teaching fairs, this portion of the presentation will focus on inservice delivery systems including staffing patterns.

The imperative need for inservice delivery systems and staffing patterns has long been relegated to a poorly illuminated sector of the continuing educational process. Yet this need has never been greater than at present. Great technological and humanistic advances in both the arts and sciences as well as significant modifications and transitions in science, education and industry with

accompanying changes in employment demands; including charges in the value systems of those engaged in the educational profession, along with the gradual decrease in population expansion have all contributed to, and highlighted the need for, a rapid and comprehensive development of unique, innovative and above all, flexible inservice delivery systems.

For school divisions to continue to ask that colleges and universities carry an excess of ninety-five per cent of this increasingly onerous burden is to be both unrealistic and benignly malicious. School systems can no longer anticipate that inservice delivery systems will be developed by them for rules to the exception. Indeed, the exception is now the common place. Nor can school districts expect that their inservice needs will dissipate or become less critical as a result of studied omission on their part. College and university units either cannot or are incapable of fulfilling inservice requests in an intelligent and informative fashion in more and more instances.

A personalized approach is needed to effect inservice delivery systems employing the most viable strategies available. It is submitted that effective inservice delivery systems can be developed and flourish through teacher involvement in the identification of the inservice required. That is, for example, the staff of the teacher center in our area have visited every school in the inservice domain and shared the variety of services that could be made available. At least 85% of the teachers have had one on one contact designed to elicit from them, personal concerns and desires for their professional development.

Inservice education is more than content offered or courses attended. It also involves a professional sharing of both ideas and attitudes. It originates in the teacher, in addition to the teacher center and the university agencies.

One major potential of the teacher center and university effort in inservice could be the ability to bring teachers from outlying areas together to share rele-

vant classroom activities. This could stimulate an interest in teachers visiting various professionals in other schools where imaginative instruction is taking place. In this context, the teacher center/university cooperative effort can be a vehicle for subject specialists to articulate with one another.

In summary, those of us involved in professional education commonly give lip service to the significance of inservice education and its subsequent delivery modes, but few have undertaken a comprehensive analysis of that which we praise. This is particularly the case with those of us engaged in higher education activities. It seems reasonable to expect that professional educators at the university and teacher center levels should make an attempt to plan and implement unique and innovative delivery systems not only within their own specific locales, but nationally as well.

Educationally meaningful inservice delivery systems and staffing patterns must be both flexible and responsive to their clientele's needs. At the same time these delivery systems and staffing patterns must be interfaced with the fundamental educational needs of the local populous and the demands of the broader society. Therefore, the university and teacher center accepting this highly significant and critical task must come to grips and effectively reconcile these basic, and in many cases, diametrically opposed stances.

UNIVERSITY AND TEACHER CENTER: PLANNING OF THE ACTIVITIES

Inservice has in the past, and continues today to be directed and influenced by administrative decision making at both the university and school district levels. It is believed that decisions at this level will always be essential in order for these institutions to maintain their planned direction and fulfill the broad objectives associated with specialized teacher training, program

development and curriculum planning and revisions. Public and private school teachers often desire specialized types of inservice that cannot always be identified or delivered by the universities or school districts. Personalized contact is difficult to maintain with individual teachers and often the needs of a small number of teachrs cannot be met because of financial constraints. In Montana, the aforementioned problems have been overcome by effectively integrating the established inservice networks previously mentioned with that of the newly formed Teacher Center for Gallatin County. The combination of all these efforts permits effective identification and selection of substantive programmatic content that not only services large group needs but if necessary, the individual teacher as well.

All Teacher Centers would do well to subscribe to a personalized approach. It can be argued that effective inservice will grow through teacher involvement in the appropriate identification of the inservice. For example, Teacher Center staff should visit every school in their service area and share the variety of services that their centers could provide. These visitations and the interaction that results quite often are probing and in the end it is known exactly what the needs are. There literally should be effort extended to put teachers in touch with the determination of their professional development. These need assessments conducted through personal contact survey methods are essential if accurate data are to be collected to guide the inservice planning.

Written need assessment questionnaires should also be used by teacher centers. This method permits the collection of large amounts of data with efficient use of staff time. This is one area where universities can provide assistance, both in the design of the instruments to be used and the identification of effective and efficient means of analysis. Computer scoring and analysis expertise are available at all universities.

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Teacher centers are governed by policy boards whose composition are primarily school teachers with some school administrators and a higher education representative. The higher education representative on the policy board is the vital link to effect cooperative efforts between teacher centers and universities. This individual provides the communication link by channeling information in both directions, thus facilitating planning activities between teacher centers and universities. Because of the position held on the policy board, the higher education representative also serves in an important advisory role.

Teacher centers govern their own operation and are involved in planning a variety of activities. Some of these pertain more directly to universities than others.

The informal "buzz" session or idea exchange mentioned previously is an example of a center activity that is usually teacher center facilitated. When small group needs are determined, the center organizes the teachers so they can meet and swap ideas. These sessions are very effective and result in idea sharing across district lines if the teacher center serves more than one district or between schools if it services only one. An example of this type of activity in our locale was when the Teacher Center for Gallatin County contacted various school subject specialists and requested aid in the identification of potential inservice topics. Reading specialists and teachers were one group that were surveyed. They were asked their opinion on what emphases were needed with regard to improving reading instruction at their school. They either responded immediately or talked with other teachers in the school about concerns regarding reading programs. Through their expertise, they were able to identify and communicate to the center what they believed required additional focus. From this point the center helped organize a "buzz" session or idea exchange for primary teachers who wanted to utilize more language experience in their classrooms. Teachers in the area who relied heavily

upon this approach were invited to share their programs at the idea exchange held at the center. All of the teachers in the service area were invited to participate and the reading specialists who originally identified this as a problem personally invited teachers from their schools. In addition, concern was expressed by a number of junior high school teachers who found themselves lacking in skill areas associated with teaching reading. The university was contacted and a three credit course was specifically developed and conducted which addressed the issues teachers desired along with additional content the professor determined necessary for subject completeness. The course was a tremendous success because it focused on specific teacher needs and was well rounded by the professor's expertise.

Teacher centers and universities can also cooperate in the planning and delivery of workshops. Montana State University, primarily because of its rural location, has in the past sought to supplement its regular summer offerings with special topics workshops utilizing nationally prominent individuals and quality consultants from outside its immediate geographic area. The teacher center and university have pooled both money and physical and human resources in order to provide quality credit workshops. Associated with these workshops can also be credit seminars where smaller groups meet with consultants. In cases where college credit is given, the university designates one of its faculty to either plan the course directly or participate in an active advisory role.

Special arrangements can also be made for practicum experiences. The Department of Elementary Education at Montana State University, as part of its program, requires its junior level students to serve two quarters for four half days every week, in an elementary classroom as an instructional aide. Occasionally students come through the program who have either taught at the secondary level or served as a teachers aide. These students have

different needs than the typical elementary education candidate. The department head has approached the teacher center to investigate alternatives for these select students. As a result, the university is now placing a small number of these students in practicum experiences at the teacher center. These students work directly with the center's curriculum consultant in developing learning packages for rural schools, thus gaining experiences in curriculum development. Upon completion of these materials, the practicum student goes to selected schools and helps in the instructional sessions associated with the constructed materials.

The University recently organized a "teaching fair" to aid university faculty in teaching methods, evaluation, computer usage, media, advising, writing and assorted other topics. The two day fair featured sixteen workshops and twenty-one exhibits.

The teacher center disseminated information on the "teaching fair" to teachers in the area so that those interested could attend. Even though the fair was designed for university personnel, the teachers were welcome.

An obvious means for a university to cooperatively plan activities with a teacher center is to become involved in writing the grants for federal or state assistance. The Teacher Center for Gallatin County is completing its third and final year on its original Office of Education grant application. Therefore, there has been recent activity focusing on a new teacher center grant application for Montana. The higher education representative was both associated and active in this process.

One example of the benefits of University-Teacher Center cooperation has resulted in a proposed cooperative plan involving telecommunications. The University had recently secured monies from two sources for television production, dissemination equipment and program production. This vast network will link up thirty sites throughout Montana. The teacher center is currently

experiencing difficulties in delivering services to teachers located great distances from the center site in Bozeman. In addition, the new grant application includes the merging of two teacher centers thereby expanding the service area to include twenty counties in Western Montana. This service area is greater in size than the state of Virginia. A natural solution to these problems was to build a telecommunications component into the Teacher Center grant application. This component requests monies to develop telecommunications inservice programming which will then be delivered by the MSU Telecommunications in Education and Research for Montana delivery system. The Montana State University system will be capable of delivering color videotaped television programs via microwave and cable systems. In addition, an interactive audio component (4 wire) will also be available for teleconferencing. A cooperative effort here aids both the University and the Teacher Center. The University wishes to secure programs for its delivery system and both the University and Teacher Center need to reach teachers in rural areas.

Universities and teacher centers both service teacher needs and if planning, implementation and evaluation are conducted cooperatively, both can benefit.

EVALUATING THE JOINT ENDEAVOR

Although teacher centers may operate under different educational ideologies; behavioral, humanistic or developmental, the principal emphasis for all the center is a common denominator - improvement in staff development resulting in the improvement in classroom instruction. This leads to a consideration of the evaluative process.

Evaluation research is the systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of information concerning the activities, needs, outcomes and impact of programs to enable interested persons to make judgements about specific aspects of what the program is accomplishing. Evaluations should be undertaken for

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management and administrative purposes for planning and policy development and to meet fiscal accountability.

In focusing on teacher center projects funded by federal grants, it becomes readily apparent that evaluations of such programs are mandatory. The federal government requires some evidence with regard to the extent to which a project is achieving its goals. Program directors are concerned with questions involving the quality and future of a program, whether changes should be made in its operation and if the program should be expanded or contracted.

Evaluation research contributes to rational decision making. Decisions relative to budget allocations and program planning can be made as a derivative of the objective information gleaned from programmatic outcomes.

According to Rossi, Freeman and Wright, there are essentially four sets of questions that one is concerned with in this context. These correspond to four types of evaluation activities: 1) Program planning questions; 2) Program monitoring questions; 3) Impact assessment questions; 4) Economic efficiency questions.

In evaluating teacher center projects for program planning and development, statements of desired goals or policy need to be clearly articulated. For example, if the goal is to raise educational levels, the general aim may be stated as providing reading, writing and arithmetic skills to the students who are deficient in these areas. A program plan would specify the participating population, delineate the intervention methods and estimate cost and staffing needs.

Evaluation at the planning stage would include descriptive statistics of the participants through such variables as age, sex and socio-economic status. In addition, participants need to be defined in operational terms. For instance, an "adequate" amount of educational skill needs to be determined. Then, the variables of the proposed method of intervention as an effective way to eradicate the problem must be identified.

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Project monitoring evaluation of teacher center programs is significant because it provides a systematic assessment as to whether a program is operating in conformity with its design and whether it is reaching the specific target populations.

An impact evaluation of teacher center programs provides data relative to the extent to which a program causes change in the desired direction. When a proposal for a center project is written, certain pre-specified, operationally defined goals and criteria of success are stated. An impact evaluation would demonstrate that the changes which occurred were a function of the particular program, intervention or treatment, and so, could not be accounted for in other ways. This type of research often embodies an experimental design in which there are randomly selected control and experimental groups receiving different treatments. However, impact evaluation can be conducted utilizing non-experimental designs also.

Teacher centers generally compete with each other for funds from government, foundations and other organizations. Choices are made by the funding agencies as to whether or not to fund, continue, expand or contract one program as compared with another. Economic efficiency evaluation would yield data relative to cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis. In analyzing teacher center programs for cost-effectiveness, programs with similar objectives are evaluated and the cost of alternatives for reaching the same goals may be compared. All of the preceding types of evaluations can be conducted through utilization of sophisticated experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

Electronic data processing utilizing survey research methods can be effectively used in collecting pertinent data for any facet of evaluation or comprehensive evaluations encompassing all areas.

Questionnaires and inventories can be developed relative to the type of evaluation desired. In evaluating jointly sponsored teacher center/university

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programs or any component thereof, care should be taken in controlling the questions and determining variables that will elicit pertinent information. Decision makers, program managers, program personnel, staff and users of the programs should be consulted in constructing the instrument. These people should have a clear knowledge of program goals and processes. A rating scale using quantitative and qualitative descriptions can be used in collecting information/data.

This information can be coded, keyed and programmed into the computer for storage. Statistical analysis of the information/data can be processed by utilizing SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Service) packages. SPSS packages can also be used in evaluating impact and economic efficiency assessments in a variety of contexts.

SPSS can be effectively used for processing information by generating data files for local teachers, community resources, workshops, seminars, informal "buzz" sessions, tutorial relationships, supervision of collegial interactions, courses, instructional vignettes, closed circuit instruction and traveling road shows.

In summary, in the evaluation of such jointly sponsored ventures, evaluation results should provide necessary information to aid in the making of process judgements regarding policy formation, program design, management and other components based on the analysis of data. An evaluation should make valid comments and recommendations for program management and improvement.

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